



EDUCATION TO WOMEN IN INDIA: EMPOWERMENT OF A MARGINALISED SECTION IN THE COUNTRY

Dr. Suman Buwa

M.S.W., Ph.D. (Social Work), Acting Director, Department of Life Long Education & Extension Work, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra.

Introduction:

Everyday news and events of exploitation of women in various forms around us clearly encourage our consensus that women continues to be the victims of marginalisation and discrimination in some or other ways. Despite the fact that there have been spreading awareness and measures to empower women, they are being marginalised in terms of education, job opportunities and health facilities in many parts of the country. They have been the victims of social ills. And thus it attracts our attention towards the vacuum present in their development. This secondary and inferior treatment given to them contradicts the Constitutional provision of treatment of equality to all. In present times where India as a country is emerging as one of the fastest developing country in global scenario, the contribution of the country's half population cannot be overlooked from the national development perspective. In Indian landscape, women; with minor difference in sex ratio, being equal portion of the country's total populace itself take shape of a community. Though not all, majority of them are in need of their empowerment for the development of their community as a whole.

Methodology of the study

The Researcher, has been one of the active functionaries of various development programmes for women organised by The Department of Life Long Education and Extension formerly known as The Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension Work, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra. She has been receiving positive feedbacks from the beneficiaries of the programmes. Most of the feedbacks from women beneficiaries indicate their enhanced socio-economic status and quality of life. Therefore with respect to contribute to the endeavour of empowerment of women, one of the marginalised communities in our society, the researcher, with the help of descriptive research methodology in the present study, wishes to discuss how women in Indian context can be empowered for their development. The present study mainly focuses the discussion about women in the jurisdiction of the three districts of The Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension Work, Shivaji University Kolhapur presently known as the Department of Life Long Education and Extension considering the issues and challenges faced by women in India are close to similar.

Objectives of the study :

1. To understand the significance of women's empowerment in saving women from the treatment of marginalisation
2. To state the significance of education in removing marginalisation
3. To address the contribution of The Department of Life Long Education and Extension formerly known as the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension Work Shivaji University, Kolhapur in empowering women of its jurisdiction for their development

Women: The Victims

All the societal members irrespective of their caste and gender have been given equal rights in the constitution of India. However many events around us witness that there is a difference between the constitutional provision and the actual treatment given to them in reality. Women in India can be said to be one of the biggest victims of the same. Most of the women in India, be it from urban or rural area, continue to suffer the social ill of gender inequality inside or outside the household. The nature of the suffering may be in varied forms but one thing is sure that they have been victim and need our attentions for their development.

In Indian context majority of women population reside in villages because the numbers of villages are more in the country. With some difference in sex ratio women constitutes almost half of the total population of the country. Life of people in most of the part of India is influenced by traditional and cultural beliefs. The perception towards women has continued to be more or less same like it was in olden days. There has been improvement in the perception and acceptance of women's development in the male dominating society. The efforts for women's empowerment and so in their development by policy makers and the Government have been increasing and seem to be giving positive results. However, there persists a greater scope for women's development. Hence the phenomenon of

women's development in India calls for holistic approach by all the possible ways by all the possible sources and mechanisms. Women in most of the parts of India have been the victims of marginalisation. They have been extremely vulnerable to ill health, despite being the most important part of human reproductive system do not even enjoy their fundamental rights of decision making, they have been facing denial of participation in their personal, familial, societal and political matters. Despite being equally capable they are being belittled for education and their economic development. Their role has been confined to the duties of raising children, looking after families and other household activities.

Marginalisation also known as social exclusion, a process that stops access, opportunities, fundamental rights and resources. As described the term empowerment "indicates the intent to and the process of assisting individuals, groups, families and communities to discover and expend the resources and tools within and around them." The term empowerment can also be described as the process that is related to make powerful to the less powerful. Various studies and researches conducted shows that women have been the victims of marginalisation on the grounds of gender, class and age. This paper mainly discusses the marginalisation of women on the discriminatory treatment given to them owing to factors like perception to look at them as a weaker sex.

Empowerment for abolition of Marginalisation

It was in 1985 at the International Conference at Nairobi when the concept of empowerment was presented for first time. There have been a number of definitions and views by different researchers, scholars, thinkers, academicians. The Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia mentions "Empowerment refers to increasing economic, political, social, educational, gender or spiritual strengths of any entity or entities." Therefore it may be understood that empowerment is not only related to physical strength only of an individual or a group but moreover it is to do with emotional and intellectual side of an individual or a group.

"The Programme of Action 1992 mentions following parameters of women's empowerment.

- Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of women;
- Building positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and the economy
- Developing the ability to think critically
- Fostering decision making and action through collective processes
- Enabling women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health especially reproductive health
- Ensuring Equal Participation in developmental processes;
- Providing information, knowledge and skill for economic independency
- Enhancing access to legal literacy and information related to their rights and entitlements in the society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas."

In Indian societal background women have been belittled as a weaker sex in most of the parts of the country. There is a need to elevate them to make them equal with men in all the walks of life. Therefore empowering women can be the way to accord them power and strength to enable them to develop themselves and prevent their marginalisation. The first ever National Policy for the empowerment of Women was approved in the year 2001. The policy chiefly aims at advancement, development and empowerment of women to attain the treatment of equality to them.

Broadly speaking women's development can be attained mainly by the way of their educational, economic and social empowerment. Among them educational

empowerment can be said to be the door to the empowerment in other spheres of life. Education has a power to create awareness and enable oneself to gain knowledge for development. Education can not only play vital role in development of the needy but also to the people around them who has an effective role to play in facilitating acquisition of education. Education proves instrumental in developing one's fullest capacity making him or her the productive member of the society. The objective of imparting education to women must be similar to the objective of the imparting education to men. However considering the present status and need for women's development, the aspect of education to women can be discussed exclusively. Education for women is process that leads to women's development at various stages and ultimately adds to the national development. It first brings about physical, social and mental development of woman. It enables her participation in social and economic development. And empowerment of women as a community finally adds to the national development of the country.

Shivaji University Kolhapur established The Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension Work in 1984. The prime objective of the establishment of the department is to take education to the masses and attain their all round development. The department organises programmes for skill development, promotion of individual interest, enhancing quality of life, awareness, health education etc. Three district of Kolhapur, Sangli and Satara come under the jurisdiction of the university. The jurisdiction mainly encompasses more of the rural areas. The programmes organised for the development of women of its jurisdiction mainly focus on economic, spiritual or emotional, social and health empowerment through education.

The department organises various such programmes which help the participants enhance their employability for jobs outside as well as for self employment. Today globalization has opened up new avenues of employment opportunities. Technology has facilitated the ways of living life and running a business enterprise. On the other hand the world of globalisation and technology demands one be skilfully fit enough to survive in it. It demands that one cannot stop acquisition of education and it offers that one can acquire education any time anywhere. Therefore economic development of an individual largely depends upon his or her employability at any given times. In this backdrop the department organises various skill development and individual interest programme to instil and initiate skill development for enhancing employability. The programmes are designed to satisfy current needs of the market. Programmes like computer literacy, event management, personality development, Fruit and flower decorations, articles making from materials like jute, imitation jewellery etc. are organised by the department. The feedbacks of programme speak their effectiveness in development of an individual from a novice to a skilled persons. The feedbacks received from the beneficiaries of the programme state that because of the skill development they have been getting many employment opportunities which in turn have brought about their economic development.

Thus all the programmes prove instrumental in attaining economic, health, educational and social development of women of the area. They have with more or less intensity have proved instrumental in enhancing quality of life of the beneficiaries of the programmes.

There have been prejudiced perceptions of the society to look at women as a weaker sex. In many communities a girl child is considered a liability. She is been given secondary preference for education and other facilities because the expenditure on a girl is considered as a waste while it is considered an investment on a male child i.e. son. This, therefore, gives birth to secondary and discriminatory treatment to girl. This discriminatory treatment leads to marginalisation of female member of the family in proper health and sanitation facilities. Since a woman has major biological responsibility of child bearing it becomes important to take care of her reproductive health. Poor sanitation and facilities and lack of nutritious diet due to marginalisation causes many women to suffer health disorders and diseases. Therefore with respect to first create awareness The Department of Life Long Education and Extension formerly, Shivaji University Kolhapur organises programme on Gender Equality. The programmes attempt to create awareness about a woman importance in our life and so of their proper care. Programmes like gender equality, save a baby girl, Female infanticide, Health and Hygiene, Nutritious and healthy diet are organised by the department. The department has been experiencing many positive feedbacks from the women participants of the jurisdiction of the department.

The Department also organises various awareness and knowledge based programme to provide the women of the jurisdiction with the legal rights of women. Programmes like Legal Literacy, Kayadasaathi are some of them. By participating in the programmes the participants have been able to know their legal rights.

All the programmes have been attaining women's development in the forms of enhanced level of confidence, skill and knowledge development for economic development, self sufficiency and feeling of self reliance, improvements in their health due to adoption of healthy and hygienic practices and healthy diet, treatment of equality, enhanced social status. Therefore the positive change noticed in the women beneficiaries of the programme clearly manifest that marginalisation of women can be prevented or stopped by the way of their empowerment through education further resulting in a community development.

Conclusion:

All the societal members irrespective of their caste and gender are given equal rights in the constitution of India. Despite that women in most of the parts of India continue to be being marginalised in terms of education, job opportunities and health facilities. Marginalisation also known as social exclusion, a process that stops access, opportunities, fundamental rights and resources. Broadly speaking women's development can be attained mainly by the way of their educational, economic and social empowerment. Among them educational empowerment can be said to be the door to the empowerment into the other spheres of life. Since its establishment The Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension Work, now The Department of Life Long Education and Extension, Shivaji University Kolhapur organises programmes for skill development, promotion of individual interest, enhancing quality of life, awareness, health education etc for empowerment and development of women of its jurisdiction. All the programmes have been attaining women's development in the forms of enhanced level of confidence, skill and knowledge development for economic development, self sufficiency and feeling of self reliance, improvements in their health due to adoption of healthy and hygienic practices and healthy diet, treatment of equality, enhanced social status. The positive change noticed in the women beneficiaries of the programme clearly manifest that marginalisation of women can be prevented or stopped by the way of their empowerment by education further leading to a community development for national development.

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